

Seal DW, Margolis AD, Binson D, Morrow K, Eldridge G, Kacanek D, Belcher L, Sosman J, and the Project START Study Group. HIV, STD, and hepatitis risk behavior among 18-29 year old men incarcerated in the United States. XIV International Conference on AIDS; July 7–12, 2002; Barcelona Spain. Abstract WeOrE1321.

Background: HIV/STD/hepatitis transmission among incarcerated men has been documented. Yet, little research has assessed in-prison risk behavior.

Method: A longitudinal study of HIV/STD/hepatitis risk behavior among 80 men (ages 18-29) released from prison in 4 U.S. states (CA, MS, RI, WI) included open-ended questions about their knowledge of and experience with substance use and sexual behavior during any adult incarceration(s). Thematic content analyses were used to identify key themes.

Results: (1) Substance use perceptions: Even though men believed that any drug could be obtained in prison, men in all 4 states most often mentioned marijuana, alcohol, and cocaine; men in CA and RI also mentioned heroin. Drugs were used whenever they could be obtained from other inmates, guards, and visitors; alcohol was typically brewed in prison. Drugs and alcohol were commonly used as barter for money or favors, to celebrate, and to reduce boredom/stress. (2) Sexual behavior perceptions: Men believed that inmates needed sexual release while incarcerated, and either masturbated, or had sex within 4 types of sexual partnerships: older men with younger men, female guards with male inmates, between men labelled as homosexual, or on conjugal visits (MS only). (3) Risk reduction perceptions: Most men said that little could be done to reduce in-prison HIV/STD/hepatitis risk behavior due to prison regulations and a lack of concern among inmates about protective behavior. Educational programs and condom/clean needle distribution in prison were advocated. (4) Men's own in-prison behavior: 49% of men reported substance use while incarcerated, most often marijuana or alcohol (77% and 33% of users, respectively). 14% of men reported sex while incarcerated (73% reported female partners, 27% male partners).

Conclusions: These data document in-prison substance use and sexual behavior, and highlight the need for health promotion strategies for incarcerated men.